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A SOCIOMETRIC QUESTIONNAIRE AS A GUIDE TO SELECT RESIDENT ASSISTANTS.

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IN ORDER TO INSURE THAT ONLY THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE CAPABLE OF FACILITATING POSITIVE GROWTH WITHIN OTHERS ARE CHOSEN AS RESIDENT ASSISTANTS (RA), IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT TO USE A METHOD OF SELECTION THAT IS AS SCIENTIFIC AS POSSIBLE. THE PROBLEM WAS TO SEE HOW THE DEAN OF MEN'S OFFICE (DMO) SELECTIONS COMPARED WITH THE PEER-IDENTIFIED LEADERS (PIL). THE METHOD OF INVESTIGATION WAS DESCRIPTIVE, AND THE TOOLS OF MEASUREMENT WERE THE QUESTIONNAIRE, THE INTERVIEW, AND THE CANDIDATE'S APPLICATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS. THE SAMPLE CONSISTED OF 800 SOPHOMORES AND JUNIORS ENROLLED AT HOLY CROSS COLLEGE FULL TIME. THREE HUNDRED OF THESE STUDENTS WERE VYING FOR 60 RA POSITIONS. IT WAS FOUND THAT THE HIGHER THE STUDENT RATES ON THE SOCIOMETRIC PART OF THE SELECTION PROCESS, THE MORE LIKELY HE WILL BE CHOSEN AS A RA. THAT IS, 75 PERCENT OF THE ELIGIBLE PIL WERE CHOSEN BY THE DMO. THIS PAPER WAS PRESENTED AT THE AMERICAN PERSONNEL AND GUIDANCE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION (DALLAS, MARCH 1967). (AUTHOR)

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A Sociometric Questionnaire as a Guide to Select Resident Assistants

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In order to insure that only those individuals who are capable of facilitating postive growth within others are chosen as resident assistants, it is vitally important to use a method of selection that is as scientific as possible. The problem was to see how the Dean of Men's Office selections compared with the peer identified leaders. The method of investigation was descriptive and the tools of measurement were the questionnaire, the interview, the candidates application and recommendation. The sample consisted of 800 sophomores and juniors currently enrolled at the College full time. Three hundred of these students were vying for 60 RA positions. It was found that the higher the student rates on the sociometric part of the selection process, the more likely he will be chosen as a RA. That is, 75% of the eligible PIL were chosen by the DMO.

This report summarizes a recently conducted study on the identification and selection of students to staff the residence halls at Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts.

There is evidence to suggest the potentially constructive impact Resident Assistants (RA) can have upon the students living under their supervision (Brown, 1965). In addition, the finding that all interpersonal experiences can have deteriorative as well as constructive consequences, depending upon the level of interpersonal functioning of the helping or "more knowing" person (Carkhuff & Truax, 1966), further illustrates the critical nature involved in the identification, selection, and training of residence hall staff.

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Studies on recruiting residence hall staff (Shaffer & Greenleaf, 1965) point out the fact that students can be the answer to the problem the administration has in finding people who are capable and interested in staffing a college residence hall. They further stress the importance of promoting job prestige, so that the best students will become interested in applying for the available positions.

With the continual increases in student enrollments, there will be a greater limit of professional personnel workers to staff these halls. The solution appears to lie in selecting recognized student leaders to fulfill this immediate problem (Riker, 1965). Undergraduates appear to be more interested and will be more effective than graduate students (Shaffer & Greenleaf, 1965). These student leaders will become an indispensable adjunct of the housing staff -- so indispensable that they may assume most of its day-to-day duties and leave the professional staff to concentrate on recruiting and training. Whatever their personal capabilities may be, most of the part-time student staff members will be inexperienced and untrained in student personnel work. It is vitally important that a systematic method be used to select these student leaders, so that the best can receive the best training.

Thus, one can see the importance of having facilitative RA's staffing the residence halls so that constructive rather than deteriorative educational growth takes place within the halls. In

identifying these facilitative student leaders, the authors employed a sociometric questionnaire as a base to seek out who the potential RA were (Moreno, 1951).

Methods

The College of Holy Cross has ten residence halls and each of these halls is divided into sections known as corridors. Each of the corridors has a capacity of thirty to seventy students. Every spring, fifty to sixty-five students are selected, trained, and appointed as RA's for which they receive renumeration from the college in terms of money or room and board.

The role of RA has been defined as one of facilitative leadership in which the cooperative approach is stressed and the monitorial and reporting aspects are minimized. His characteristics may vary in regards to academic achievement, background and behavioral records, but one thing is common and that is he is respected by his peers. Thus, as a device to single out who the potential RA can be, a leadership questionnaire was devised and implemented into the existing selection and screening process. The reliability of this type of a measuring device has already been tested by Kidd at Northwestern State College in 1954, and by Mills in 1953 at a similar undergraduate residential college setting.

The leadership questionnaire was administered through the Dean of Men's Office at the College. On a certain night and at an exact hour the questionnaire was given to the members of the junior and sophomore residence halls. They were not given any warning as to what was going to happen with the results and why the questionnaire was being given; with the hope that there would be little chance for any politicking. The selections were spontaneous and confidential in reaction to the question, "Please name those men on this corridor who whould in your opinion be effective as RA."

The questionnaires were collected within the hour and they were totaled by the computer. Tables were established, picturing the individual corridor, residence hall and class leaders. A mean was established for each corridor by dividing the total number of votes cast on each corridor by the total number of students voting on that particular corridor. Then each student was ranked in a plus, zero, minus category, according to his rating in regards to being above, even with, or below the mean score for his corridor. After listing all the students who had plus ratings, there was seen a need for investigating who the top sixty students were in the total population studied. (The Dean of Men's Office was interested in hiring sixty students for the coming academic year.) The sixty top students were found by dividing the number of votes a student obtained by the

number of students casting votes on his corridor. After this was done, we had a list of who the top sixty students were in terms of per cent. They were given a plus rating in step one of the selection process.

The techniques in the study were many and they represented a combination of the multiple tools of measurement that are used in research for collecting and measuring data. They were combined in order to provide a more accurate evaluation of the candidate seeking the position of RA. The tools of measurement utilized in this study were: (a) sociometric technique designed to measure the social status of each individual with respect to other members of his group; (b) the candidate's application in regards to experience and a biographical sketch; (c) recommendations from the faculty, existing RA, and his academic advisor; (d) an interview by the selection committee to measure as objectively as possible the candidate's appearance, integrity, warmth of personality and adaptability; (e) evaluation from past and present RA of the candidate's reliability and interest and enthusiasm.

Over 799 questionnaires were administered to the members of the junior and sophomore corridors within the residence halls of the College. The administration felt that the freshmen were not ready to assume the responsibilities of a RA and the seniors would be leaving our Liberal Arts undergraduate school come June. Every one of the sophomores and juniors was asked to express a preference as to which

members of his group he would most prefer to fill the position of RA for next year. Using such expressions of choice, a table was constructed illustrating how many times a particular individual was chosen and the percentage of the total corridor votes he acquired in the survey.

In an effort to further find out what characteristics the students felt were essential for the role of a RA, the questionnaire contained a second part asking, "Reasons or qualities you feel are essential to be a RA." Arbitrary responses resulted in a list of traits that are associated with present existing peer leaders in the residence halls. While many combinations were listed, those cited show consistency in that none of them were associated with what the administration labeled non-leaders. Some of the prominent characteristics listed were as follows: (1) responsible; (2)capable; (3) friendly; (4) considerate; (5) moral; (6) cooperative.

Tables were established totaling the responses of the students, the breakdown of the plus, zero, minus students, percentage of corridor votes each student received, the class the candidate came from, the academic major of the student, and a list of the most prominent leadership experiences the top candidates had participated in thus far.

The method and origin of sociometry has already been established (Moreno, 1953). His book was very informative, but it is geared for psychologists and not for student personnel workers. Kidd, on the other hand, has used the sociometric device for staff selection and has substantiated his hypothesis many times (1956). It would appear that these natural leaders are quick to gain rapport with the students and, therefore, with the administration. With this bridge of communication between the regular students and the faculty and administration, there is less chance of a misunderstanding occurring on the campus that employs its usage as there is on one that has its resident halls staffed with "robots" who were highly selected and screened by the Dean of Men's Office intuition.

Finding

Responses to the questionnaire were exceptionally good in that 719 were returned out of 799 originally distributed questionnaires for an 89 per cent return. Each item in the questionnaire was treated independently and no attempt was made initially to see if there was a correlation between characteristics and choices of the student leaders. For purposes of facilitating the selection process, the peer-identified leaders were first sorted from the sampled population. The mean helped to establish an objective cut-off mark and the authors felt that it was a valid

Procedure as it was used consistently throughout all the corridors. The results showed 58 sophomores and 45 juniors receiving a plus-rating (scored above corridor mean) from their corridor mates. Thus, out of 799 eligible candidates, a total of 103 students were above the mean scores on their corridors. In determining the rank-order of these plus-raters, a range from a low of 21 to a high of 85 per cent was established by the students.

In determining the traits associated with a RA, the authors decided to take a selected sample of every tenth questionnaire to rank their opinions. This was done for convenience and to satisfy our own curiosity as to what the students saw as necessary characteristics for a RA. The traits most commonly listed by the 80 questionnaires surveyed were: leadership, concern for others, scholarship, maturity and character. It must be brought to the reader's attention that these traits are very personal and are perceived differently by each individual, therefore, their validity on a broad scale of selection criteria will be lessened. The enlightening part of this analysis is that the students see the RA as having a responsible position of status and not one of dictatorship and tyrannical rule.

After the sociometric questionnaire was given and collected, the Dean of Men's Office announced that it was going to start screening applicants for the sixty available RA positions. All

students in the sophomore and junior classes were eligible to apply, except the class presidents, the editor of the college newspaper, and basketball players (practice at night and away from campus three nights a week during season). Out of 103 students that scored well on the questionnaire, only 68 filed for an application. The reason why the remaining 35 students did not apply was because four were going to spend their junior year abroad, eight fell into the ineligible categories and fifteen were not interested in becoming RA's and the remainder did not have enough time to devote to the program or did not reply to our follow-up questionnaire. Thus, with 68 plus-raters and 207 other students applying there was a total of 275 students applying for the 60 available positions (good sample to compare characteristics). After the applications were filed and all letters of recommendation were in, the students were rated in these additional two areas. So going into the interview phase of the selection process, each applicant had been measured in three different areas: peer identification, background, and reliability. The first round interviews with each applicant were concerned with meeting the applicant personally and seeing how he rated as far as integrity, concern for others, appearance, warmth of personality, and ability to adapt to different situations went. The interview lasted approximately one-half hour and included on the selection panel were presently-selected RA's and the Dean of Men (the panel was rotated and none of them was allowed to see the applicant's

rating chart). In this interview the panel was not interested in selecting but in eliminating those candidates who did not exhibit the qualifications of a RA. The results of this fourth phase was that 100 out of the 275 students were granted second interviews. Out of these 100 candidates, 67 of them were plus-raters on the sociometric questionnaire. Thus, only one plus-rater was eliminated from the fifth and final phase of the selection process.

In the second interview, the group technique was employed. That is, three potential candidates were called in together and a non-structured type of probing interview was held. The panel varied from time to time but it was generally made up of the Dean of Men, Assistant Dean of Men, member of faculty in behavioral sciences area, Officer of the ROTC units on campus, and two or more existing RA. The length of these interviews varied between one-half hour to forty-five minutes in duration. The purposes of this type of screening device were to see how the individual reacted in a group and to promote an air of competition. The same five categories of measurement that were used in the first interview were employed. The final tabulations resulted in the top 60 candidates from the five areas of measurement being named RA for the academic school year of 1967-1968.

A comparison of the sociometric questionnaire results with the Dean of Men's Office's final selection results was sought at this point of the study. This was done by comparing the rank-order results

of the questionnaire with the final 60 candidates. The results showed that 75 per cent of the eligible sociometric questionnaire plus-raters resulted in being named to the position of a RA. Thus, a statistically significant positive relationship was found between the peer identified leaders and the final selection results. There were definite evidences of reliability and validity exhibited in the comparison. (Ratings by the Dean's Office were consistently verified by ratings of the general student population.) What the authors were interested in at this point in the analysis was, why all the peer-identified leaders were over-burdened with other activities and beginning to show signs of strain, some had very low academic averages, one had a physical handicap that the administration felt was too great to take the chance (blind), and finally, some of the leaders were not interested in taking on the responsibilities required of a RA.

Discussion

There is a positive correlation between the eligible high plus-raters and the Dean's Office final selections. That is, the higher the student rates on the sociometric questionnaire, the more likely he will be chosen as a RA if he applies. More status seems to be associated with the position of RA when the students are given a chance to participate in the selection process. This was substantiated by the increase of applicants for the available positions over the previous years and more full-scholarship students applying. (These

students, if accepted, get no remuneration for the job.) By attaching more status to the position, there is a possibility that more students will seek out the RA for advice and to place more weight on his ideas and instructions. The administration feels that these selected RA's will be more inclined to be interested in carrying out the objectives of the College in that they will grasp the importance of the role they play in the residence hall more readily than appointed robots. The findings of the study support the conclusion that the utilization of a sociometric questionnaire provides a practical and scientific approach to the residence hall staff selection process. It enables the selection committee a means to identify the leaders whom the students view as being the most potent members of their group.

In the interests of maximizing the potential of a college residence hall, it would appear beneficial to use a sociometric questionnaire in the selection process. It is most important to remember that this study was done at the College of the Holy Cross which possesses its own particular culture and sub-cultures. Further research of a similar nature is needed to validate the findings of this study of cross cultures. The authors would also support that future investigations make adequate provisions to administer the sociometric questionnaire under closer supervision.

In order to insure a more valid selection process, we recommend that the college do a good job of informing the student body of the importance of a good RA program. Many of the students who scored high

on the sociometric questionnaire did not apply and the reason given was that they did not grasp the potential and benefits of the program.

It is strongly recommended that a concerted effort be made by interested people in the field to evolve a generally accepted theoretical framework out of which may come standardized tests to evaluate and select RA's. An unfortunate lack of aims was observed during the review of the available literature. This made comparisons among research findings virtually impossible and probably accounts for certain discrepancies within these studies.

The present investigation has touched upon only a small segment of the total range of selectivity. Even though there was a positive correlation between the eligible high plus-raters and the Dean's Office final selections, the staff felt that it would not be practical to use such an involved process every year. The reason the staff incorporated it into Stage One, was that we wanted to make certain the recognized student leaders were selected. To make the study more valid, we added to the list of selections 16 students that did not receive plus ratings in the screening tools of measurement. These students were considered to be excellent choices and appeared to have the characteristics of a good RA.

In Stage Two, these highly selected student leaders were all given the Edwards Preference Test, Bell Personality Inventory, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Strong Vocational Interest Blank Test, and The

Survey of Personal Values Test. The goal here was to separate the RA's according to their scores on these tests. Then at the end of the year these student leaders will be evaluated by the administration, themselves, one another, and the residence hall members. The results should be the identifying of the best among the best. Hopefully, the opinionated best will have test scores of difference from the rest of the student leaders. The final results of this stage will not be known until the end of May, 1967.

Finally, in Stage Three of the study, we will administer the test or an abstraction of these tests to all the students interested in becoming RA's. Those students having scores comparable to the "best highly selected" student leader test scores in Stage Two, will be appointed to the position along with others not having similar scores, but in the opinion of the Dean's Office, were good choices. At the end of the year, these RA's will be rated to see if the test score leaders end up the best again.

Further research of a similar nature is needed to validate the findings that are possible in this study of cross cultures. It is therefore, strongly advised that this investigation be replicated in different types of schools, and the best way to do this is to allow other professionals the opportunity to understand and learn what we at Holy Cross are doing. Only then, will this complex problem of selection

and its related variables ultimately be solved. It is recognized that student leaders can be useful in obtaining the goals of higher education, but what needs recognition is the selection and training of these potential facilitators.

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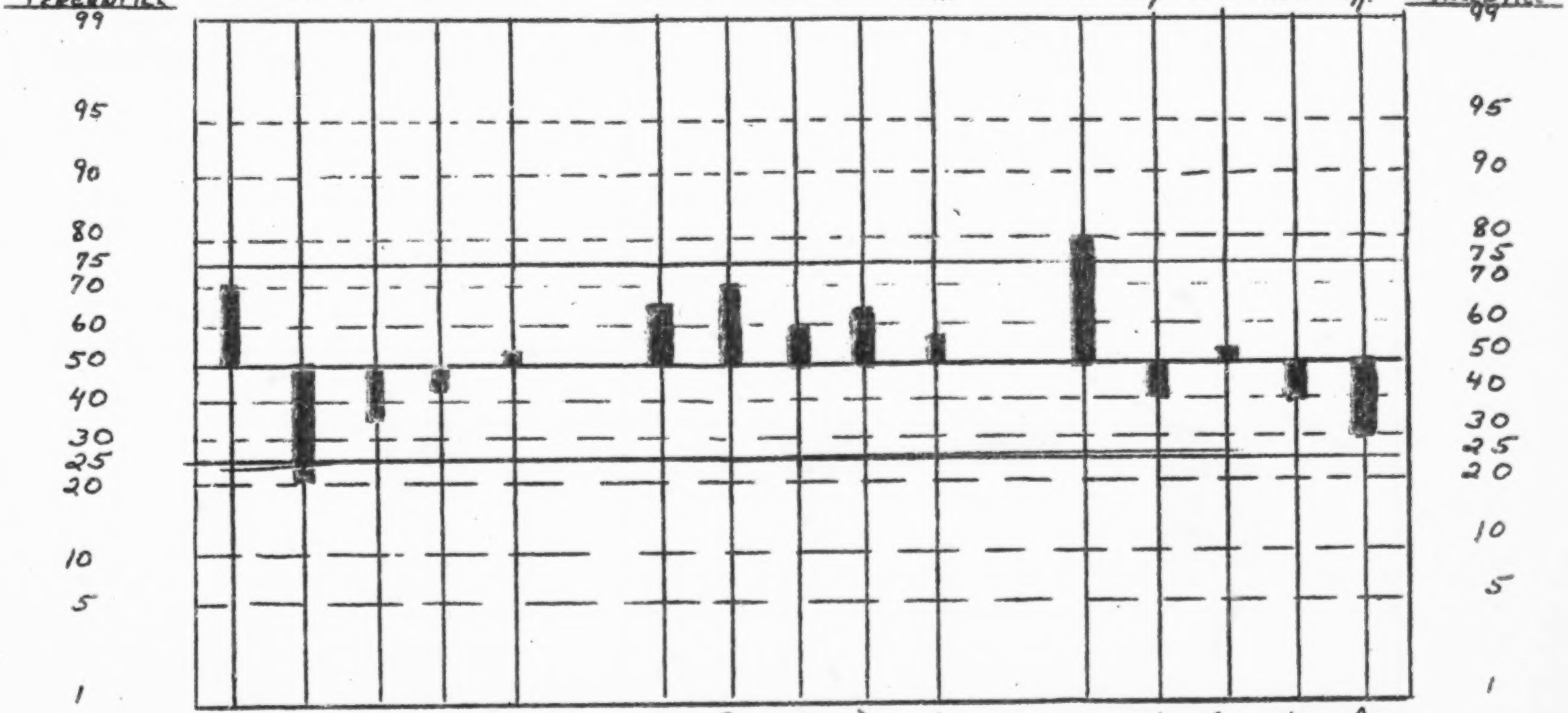
EDWARDS PERSONAL PREFERENCE SCHEDULE

N = 60

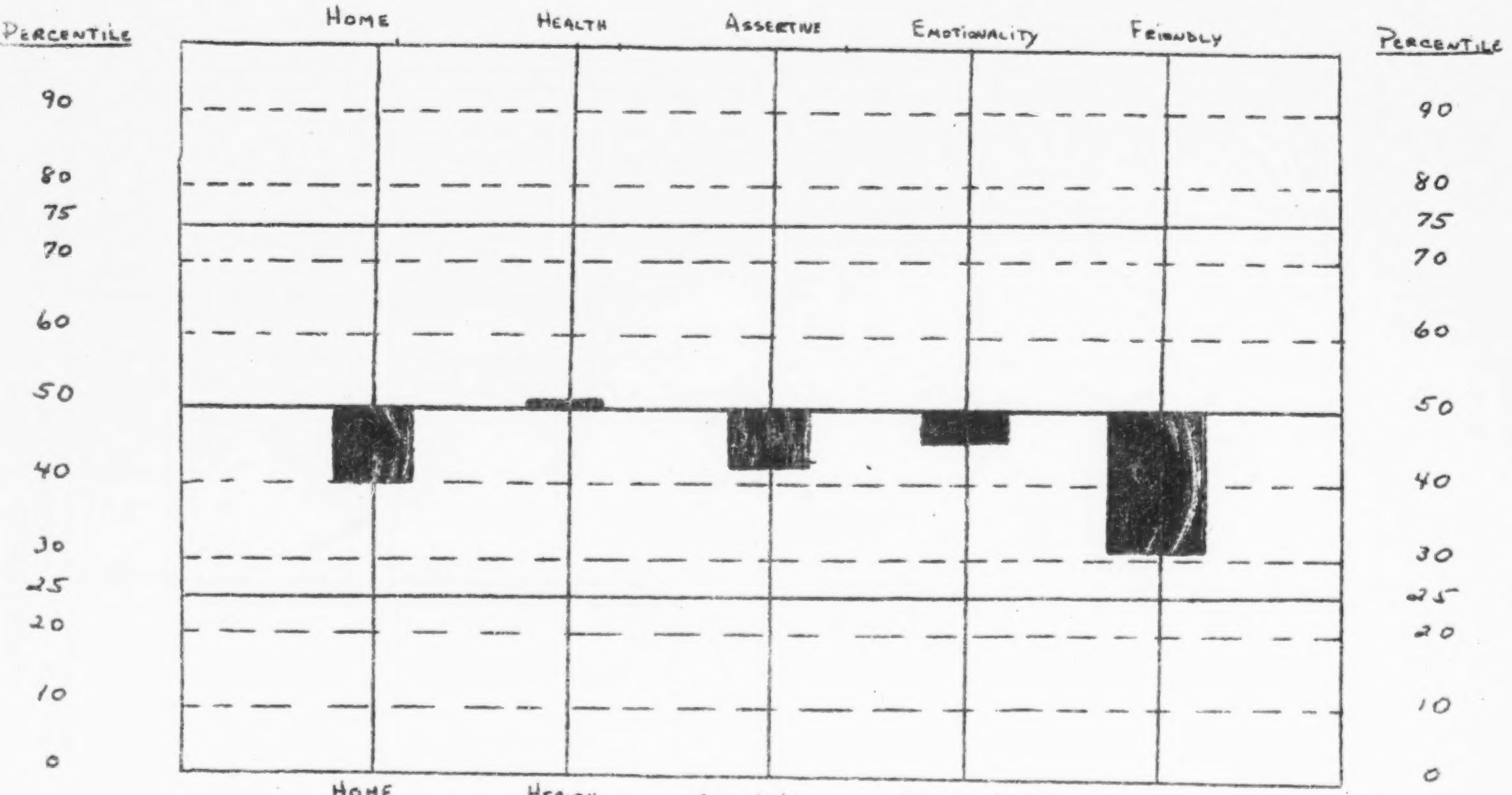


ACH.	DEF.	ORD.	EXH.	AUT.	AFF.	INT.	SUC.	DOM.	AGG.	NUR.	CHG.	END.	HET.	AGG.
70%	20%	35%	42%	54%	66%	70%	60%	63%	57%	80%	40%	53%	40%	30%

Bell Adjustment Inventory

N = 60

(The Lower Percentile The Better)



TYPE TABLE

N = 59

	SENSING THINKING	SENSING FEELING	INTUITIVES FEELING	INTUITIVES THINKING
INTRAVERTS JUDGING	ISTJ II = 2	ISFJ	INFJ I = 1	INTJ I = 1
INTRAVERTS PERCEPTIVE	ISTP I = 1	ISFP II = 2	INFP ~~HH~~ = 5	INTP II = 2
EXTRAVERTS PERCEPTIVE	ESTP I = 1	ESFP IIII = 4	ENFP ~~HH~~ II = 7	ENTP IIII = 4
EXTRAVERTS JUDGING	ESTJ ~~HH~~ III = 8	ESFJ ~~HH~~ II = 7	ENFJ II = 2	ENTJ ~~HH~~ ~~HH~~ II = 12

ST = 12
SF = 13
NT = 19
NF = 15

Es = 45
Is = 14

Ns = 34
Ss = 25

Fs = 28
Ts = 31

J's = 33
P's = 26